

*C. M. Wenger*

No. *Nil.*

FROM

MAJOR RONALD ROSS,  
INDIAN MEDICAL SERVICE,  
*On Special Duty,*

To

THE SECRETARY TO THE DIRECTOR GENERAL,  
INDIAN MEDICAL SERVICE,

*Simla.*

*Dated Calcutta, 16th February 1899.*

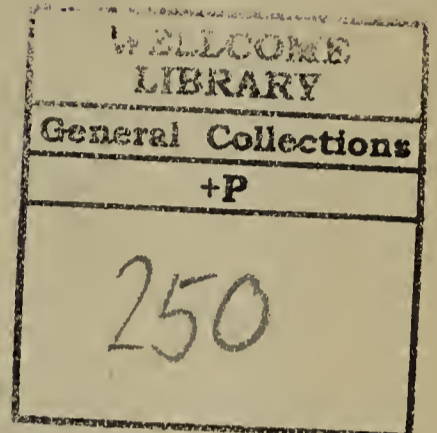
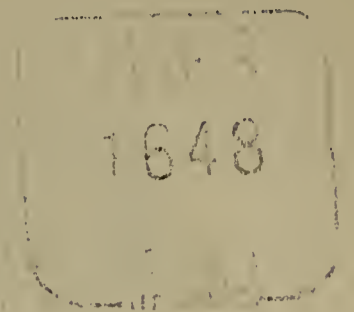
SIR,

I have the honour to address you, on completion of my term of special duty for the investigation of malaria, on the subject of the practical results as regards the prevention of the disease which may be expected to arise from my researches: and I trust that this letter may be submitted to Government if the Director General thinks fit.

It has been shewn in my reports to you that the parasites of malaria pass a stage of their existence in certain species of mosquitoes, by the bites of which they are inoculated into the blood of healthy men and birds. These observations have solved the problem—previously thought insolvable—of the mode of life of these parasites in external nature.

My results have been accepted by Dr. Laveran, the discoverer of the parasites of malaria; by Dr. Manson, who elaborated the mosquito theory of malaria; by Dr. Nuttall of the Hygienic Institute of Berlin, who has made a special study of the relations between insects and disease; and, I understand, by M. Metchinkoff, Director of the Laboratory of the Pasteur Institute in Paris. Lately, moreover, Dr. C. W. Daniels of the Malaria Commission, who has been sent to study with me in Calcutta, has confirmed my observations in a special report to the Royal Society; while, lastly, Professor Grassi and Drs. Bignami and Bastianelli of Rome have been able, after receiving specimens and copies of my reports from me, to repeat my experiments in detail, and to follow two of the parasites of human malaria through all their stages in a species of mosquito called the *Anopheles Claviger*.

It may, therefore, be finally accepted as a fact that malaria is communicated by the bites of some species of mosquito; and, to judge from the general laws governing the development of parasitic animals, such as the parasites of malaria, this is very probably the only way in which infection is acquired, in which opinion several distinguished men of science concur with me.



In considering this statement it is necessary to remember that it does not refer to the mere recurrences of fever to which people previously infected are often subject as the result of chill, fatigue, and so on. When I say that malaria is communicated by the bites of mosquitoes, I allude only to the original infection.

It is also necessary to guard against assertions to the effect that malaria is prevalent where mosquitoes and gnats do not exist. In my experience, when the facts come to be enquired into, such assertions are found to be untrue. Scientific research has now yielded so absolute a proof of the mosquito theory of malaria that hear-say evidence opposed to it can no longer carry any weight.

Hence it follows that, in order to eliminate malaria wholly or partly from a given locality, it is necessary only to exterminate the various species of insect which carry the infection. This will certainly remove the malaria to a large extent and will almost certainly remove it altogether. It remains only to consider whether such a measure is practicable.

Theoretically the extermination of mosquitoes is a very simple matter. These insects are always hatched from aquatic larvæ or grubs which can live only in small stagnant collections of water, such as pots and tubs of water, garden cisterns, wells, ditches and drains, small ponds, half-dried water-courses, and temporary pools of rain-water. So far as I have yet observed the larvæ are seldom to be found in larger bodies of water, such as tanks, rice-fields, streams and rivers, and lakes, because in such places they are devoured by minnows and other small fish. Nor have I ever seen any evidence in favour of the popular view that they breed in damp grass, dead leaves, and so on.

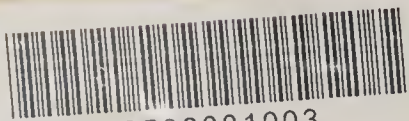
Hence, in order to get rid of these insects from a locality, it will suffice to empty out or drain away or treat with certain chemicals the small collections of water in which their larvæ must pass their existence.

But the practicability of this will depend on circumstances—especially, I think, on the species of mosquito with which we wish to deal. In my experience, different species select different habitations for their larvæ. Thus the common “brindled mosquitoes” breed almost entirely in pots and tubs of water; the common “grey mosquitoes” only in cisterns, ditches and drains; while the rarer “spotted-winged mosquitoes” seem to choose only shallow rain-water puddles and ponds too large to dry up under a week or more and too small or too foul and stagnant for minnows.

Hence the larvæ of the first two varieties are found in large numbers round almost all human dwellings in India; and, because their breeding grounds—namely, vessels of water, drains and wells—are so numerous and are so frequently contained in private tenements, it will be almost impossible to exterminate them on a large scale.

On the other hand, spotted-winged mosquitoes are generally much more rare than the other two varieties. They do not appear to breed in wells, cisterns and vessels of water, and therefore have no special connection with human habitations. In fact it is usually a matter of some difficulty to obtain their larvæ. Small pools of any permanence—such as they require—are not common in most parts of India except during the rains, and then pools of this kind are generally full of minnows which make short work of any mosquito larvæ they may find. In other words, the breeding grounds of the spotted-winged varieties seem to be so isolated and small that I think it may be possible to exterminate this species under certain circumstances.

The importance of these observations will be apparent when I add that hitherto the parasites of human malaria have been found only in spotted-winged mosquitoes—namely, in two species of them in India and in one species in Italy. As the result of very numerous experiments I think that the common brindled and grey mosquitoes are quite innocuous as regards human malaria—a fortunate circumstance for the human race in the tropics. And Professor Grassi seems to have come to the same conclusion as the result of his enquiries in Italy.



But I wish to be understood as writing with all due caution on these points. Up to the present our knowledge, both as regards the habits of the various species of mosquito and as regards the capacity of each for carrying malaria, is not complete. All I can now say is that if my anticipations be realised—if it be found that the malaria-bearing species of mosquito multiply only in small isolated collections of water which can easily be dissipated—we shall possess a simple mode of eliminating malaria from certain localities.

I limit this statement to certain localities only, because it is obvious that where the breeding pools are very numerous, as in water-logged country, or where the inhabitants are not sufficiently advanced to take the necessary precautions, we can scarcely expect the recent observations to be of much use—at least for some years to come. And this limitation must, I fear, exclude most of the rural areas in India.

Where however the breeding pools are not very numerous and where there is anything approaching a competent sanitary establishment, we may, I think, hope to reap the benefit of these discoveries. And this should apply to the most crowded areas, such as those of cities, towns and cantonments, and also to tea, coffee, and indigo estates, and perhaps to military camps.

For instance, malaria causes an enormous amount of sickness among the poor in most Indian cities. Here the common species of mosquitoes breed in the precincts of almost all the houses, and can therefore scarcely be exterminated; but pools suitable for the spotted-winged varieties are comparatively scarce, being found only on vacant areas, ill-kept gardens, or beside roads, in very exceptional positions where they can neither dry up quickly nor contain fish. Thus a single small puddle may supply the dangerous mosquitoes to several square miles containing a crowded population: if this be detected and drained off—which will generally cost only a very few rupees—we may expect malaria to vanish from that particular area.

The same considerations will apply to military cantonments and estates under cultivation. In many such malaria causes the bulk of the sickness and may often, I think, originate from two or three small puddles of a few square yards in size. Thus in a malarious part of the cantonment of Secunderabad, I found the larvæ of spotted-winged mosquitoes only after a long search in a single little pool which could be filled up with a few cart-loads of town rubbish.

In making these suggestions I do not wish to excite hopes which may ultimately prove to have been unfounded. We do not yet know all the dangerous species of mosquito, nor do we even possess an exhaustive knowledge of the haunts and habits of any one variety. I wish merely to indicate what, so far as I can see at present, may become a very simple means of eradicating malaria.

One thing may be said for certain. Where previously we have been unable to point out the exact origin of the malaria in a locality and have thought that it rises from the soil generally, we may now hope for much more precise knowledge regarding its source; and it will be contrary to experience if human ingenuity does not finally succeed in turning such information to practical account.

More than this, if the distinguishing characteristics of the malaria-bearing mosquitoes are sufficiently marked (if, for instance, they all have spotted wings), people forced to live or travel in malarious districts will ultimately come to recognise them and to take precautions against being bitten by them.

Before practical results can be reasonably looked for, however, we must find precisely—

(a) What species of Indian mosquitoes do and do not carry human malaria.

(b) What are the habits of the dangerous varieties.

I hope, therefore, that I may be permitted to urge the desirability of carrying out this research. It will no longer present any scientific difficulties, as only the methods already successfully adopted will be required. The results obtained will be quite unequivocal and definite.

But the enquiry should be exhaustive. It will not suffice to distinguish merely one or two malaria-bearing species of mosquito in one or two localities ; we should learn to know all of them in all parts of the country.

The investigation will be abbreviated if the dangerous species be found to belong only to one class of mosquito, as I think is likely ; and the researches which are now being energetically entered upon in Germany, Italy, America and Africa will assist any which may be undertaken in India, though there is reason for thinking that the malaria-bearing species differ in various countries.

As each species is detected it will be possible to attempt measures at once for its extermination in given localities as an experiment.

I regret that, owing to my work connected with *kala-azar*, I have not been able to advance this branch of knowledge as much during my term of special duty as I had hoped to do ; but I think that the solution of the malaria problem which has been obtained during this period will ultimately yield results of practical importance.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient Servant,

RONALD ROSS, D.P.H., M.R.C.S., *Major, I.M.S.,*

*On Special Duty.*